

Message Text

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ACTION SS-30

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /031 W
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R 041520Z DEC 73
FM USINT CAIRO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4542

C O N F I D E N T I A L CAIRO 3771

EXDIS

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR EG IS
SUBJECT: CALL ON VICE PRESIDENT HUSSEIN SHAFEI

1. SUMMARY: IN CALL ON HIM DECEMBER 3, VICE PRESIDENT HUSSEIN SHAFEI PHILOSOPHIZED ON HISTORICAL EGYPTIAN RESILIENCE. EXPRESSED CONFIDENCE THIS WILL AGAIN SEE EGYPT THROUGH PRESENT DIFFICULT TIME. BLAMED ISRAEL FOR POLARIZING AREA AND DEPLORED EFFORTS SOME ISRAELIS (AVNERI) TO PUSH CONCEPT OF "JEWISH SOVEREIGNTY." SHOULD THIS HAPPEN, EGYPT WILL MUSTER MUSLIM WORLD AND CONFLICT WILL TAKE ON RELIGIOUS DIMENSION. EGYPTIANS PREPARED FIGHT AND DIE TO RECOVER OCCUPIED LANDS. I REMINDED HIM US EFFORTS MOVE TOWARD JUST AND DURABLE PEACE AND ASSURED HIM THESE WILL CONTINUE. END SUMMARY.

2. DURING HOUR LONG COURTESY CALL ON SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT HUSSEIN SHAFEI DECEMBER 3, HE GAVE LENGTHY PHILOSOPHICAL DISCOURSE ON EGYPT'S ROLE AND PURPOSES. IN DOING SO, HE SAID HE DID NOT WISH TO TALK ABOUT "KILOMETER 101" DIFFICULTIES. RATHER HE WISHED ASSESS CURRENT SITUATION IN LIGHT HISTORICAL PROCESSES. EGYPT HAS HAD LONG HISTORY. IT HAS HAD UPS AND DOWNS, BUT EACH TIME HAS DEMONSTRATED RESILIENCE TO RECOVER. IT MIGHT TAKE YEARS, BUT ULTIMATELY IT WILL SUCCEED. ISRAEL, HE CONTENDED, HAS POLARIZED ME. EGYPT AND ARAB WORLD HAD LONG RECORD OF TOLERANCE. THERE WAS NO CONFIDENTIAL

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DISCRIMINATION ON GROUNDS RACE, CREED, COLOR, ETC. JEWS HAD LIVED IN EGYPT CONTENTEDLY UNTIL ISRAEL'S PRESENCE COMPELLED WEALTHIER ONES TO LEAVE. JEWISH COMMUNITY STILL EXISTS IN CAIRO AND WORSHIPS FREELY.

HE LIKENED MODERN-DAY ZIONISM TO CRUSADES. DURING THE CRUSADES FOREIGN ELEMENTS HAD SURGED INTO THE MIDDLE EAST, CONTROLLED MANY OF ITS PARTS FOR SOME TIME, BUT THEIR STRENGTH HAD ULTIMATELY EBBED AND THEY HAD BEEN FORCED TO LEAVE. SO, HE PREDICTED, IT WILL BE WITH ISRAEL IF LATTER SCORNS A JUST PEACE.

3. EGYPT, HE STRESSED, IS LOOKED TO BY ARAB AND AFRICAN STATES AS LEADER. IT WILL PROVIDE THAT LEADERSHIP. ISRAELI CHALLENGE IS A TEST. GOE MUCH PREFERS TO DEVELOP ITS RESOURCES FOR THE BENEFIT OF ITS PEOPLE, BUT WILL NOT SHIRK FROM ITS RESPONSIBILITIES TO RECOVER OCCUPIED ARAB LANDS. EVEN IF IT SHOULD FAIL THIS TIME, THERE WILL BE ANOTHER AND STILL ANOTHER UNTIL SUCCESS IS FINALLY ACHIEVED. EGYPTIAN PEOPLE ARE FATALISTS. FOR WHAT THEY DEEPLY BELIEVE THEY WILL FIGHT WITH COMPLETE DISREGARD OF PERSONAL FEELINGS. THEY KNOW FATE IS IN GOD'S HANDS. IT MAKES NO DIFFERENCE WHETHER THEY LIVE OR DIE. AND, HE CLAIMED, EGYPTIANS' EMOTIONS ARE AT PRESENT SO AROUSED THAT PEOPLE ARE PREPARED TO DIE TO DRIVE ISRAELIS OUT OF OCCUPIED LANDS.

4. LAST YEAR ISRAELI WRITER AVNERI HAD WRITTEN BOOK ON "SOVEREIGN JUDAISM." ISRAEL SHOULD ASSERT "SOVEREIGNTY" OVER WORLD JEWRY. HE CALLED THIS THE HEIGHT OF IMPUDENCE. IF ISRAEL SHOULD PURSUE SUCH POLICY, HE SAID, EGYPT WILL MUSTER MUSLIM WORLD AND CONFLICT WILL BECOME RELIGIOUS IN NATURE.

5. EGYPT BELIEVES IN GOOD RELATIONS WITH BOTH SUPERPOWERS, HE AFFIRMED, BUT IT IS NOT PREPARED RELINQUISH ITS INDEPENDENCE AND RIGHTS. HE HOPED US-EGYPTIAN RELATIONS WOULD IMPROVE.

6. I ASSURED SHAFEI USG ALSO WANTS IMPROVED RELATIONS. THAT WAS WHY SECRETARY HAD SENT ME HERE. AS RESULT
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EQUILIBRIUM FLOWING FROM RECENT HOSTILITIES, PRESENT MAY BE PROPITIOUS TIME TO TRY TO NARROW DISTANCES BETWEEN THE PARTIES. USG PREPARED TO DO UTMOST TO ACHIEVE THIS. WE ALSO LOOK TO GOE TO DO ITS PART. I SUGGESTED WE SHOULD NOT BE TOO CONCERNED ABOUT SWEEPING CLAIMS SUCH AS THOSE OF AVNERI. I WAS NOT AWARE OF ANY OFFICIAL GOI ENDORSEMENT OF SUCH GRANDIOSE CONCEPTS. I RECALLED THERE HAVE BEEN SOME INDICATIONS OF RETHINKING OF STRATEGIC DOCTRINES ON PART OF ISRAELIS. WHILE NEGOTIATING PROCESS WOULD NOT BE EASY, WITH COMMON DESIRE ACHIEVE JUST AND DURABLE SETTLEMENT PROGRESS OUGHT TO BE POSSIBLE.

7. COMMENT: DESPITE LENGTH OF CONVERSATION, IT CONTAINED LITTLE SUBSTANTIVE. I GAINED THE IMPRESSION THAT SHAFEI IS EITHER NOT CLOSELY CLUED IN ON US-GOE EXCHANGES OR PREFERS NOT TO INVOLVE HIMSELF. HE IS BEING USED PRIMARILY FOR PROTOCOL AND CEREMONIAL PURPOSES. A DIGNIFIED GENTLEMAN, WHO LOOKS SLIGHTLY TIRED AND OLDER THAN HIS AGE OF 55, HE IS CLEARLY DEEPLY RELIGIOUS WITH A STRONG SENSE THAT, WHATEVER THE IMMEDIATE OUTCOME OF THE PRESENT STRUGGLE, EGYPT IS ULTIMATELY PREDESTINED TO SUCCEED.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 10 MAY 1999
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: FOREIGN RELATIONS, ARABS, JEWS, DISCRIMINATION, PEACE TALKS, MEETINGS, POLITICAL SITUATION, DIPLOMATIC DISCUSSIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 04 DEC 1973
Decaption Date: 28 MAY 2004
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: morefirh
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1973CAIRO03771
Document Source: ADS
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: n/a
Film Number: P750032-1191
From: CAIRO
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1973/newtext/t19731256/abqceepc.tel
Line Count: 122
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, TEXT ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION SS
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: morefirh
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 11 DEC 2001
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <11-Dec-2001 by thigpegh>; APPROVED <07-Jan-2002 by morefirh>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: CALL ON VICE PRESIDENT HUSSEIN SHAFEI
TAGS: PFOR, EG, IS, (SHAFEI, HUSSEIN)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005